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BRITISH PM BORIS JOHNSON TO CUT SHORT INDIA VISIT

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has reduced the length of his trip to India later this month because of the Covid situation in the country

DEFENCE, SECURITY PACTS LIKELY TO BE INKED

"The PM has made the decision to reduce the length of the visit," Johnson's spokesman told reporters on Wednesday. The highlight of the trip will be high-level discussions with the Indian Government and business leaders, he said, adding that bulk of the programme would now take place on April 26. Some defence and security pacts are likely to be finalised during the visit

1ST MAJOR VISIT BY U.K. P.M. AFTER BREXIT

Johnson was expected to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade this year. However, the visit was called off as the UK went through one of its worst pandemic phases
This will be the UK Prime Minister's first major foreign visit after Britain's exit from the European Union

₹5.31 lakh cr
MARKET VALUE OF THE U.K.'S FDI IN INDIA AS OF MARCH 2020, ACCORDING TO RBI DATA

DIBS ON THIS DEBATE
APR 15 | 6 PM | EDEXLIVE.COM

Covid cancels CBSE Class 10 boards, Class 12 call in June

Decision taken at meeting chaired by Modi; exams were scheduled to begin on May 4

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

IN view of the soaring Covid-19 cases across the country, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Wednesday cancelled Class 10 exams and postponed Class 12 exams.

The decision was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and attended by Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank and other senior officials on Wednesday.

The examinations were scheduled to begin on May 4, but students, parents and many state governments were demanding the tests be deferred in view of the raging pandemic.

"The results of Class Xth Board will be prepared on the basis of an objective criterion to be developed by the Board," the Education Ministry said in a statement shortly after the meeting. "Any candidate who is not satisfied with the marks allocated to him or her on this basis will be given an opportunity to sit in an exam as and when the conditions are conducive to hold the exams."

As for the Class 12 exams, the government will review the situation on June 1 to decide fresh dates and make an announcement at least 15 days before the start of the exam.

The decision comes after around two lakh students signed petitions urging the gov-

ernment to either cancel the board exams scheduled to be held in May or conduct them in online mode. The hashtag "cancelboardexams" was trending on Twitter for a week.

Officials, however, have made it clear that given the nature of the tests, it may not be possible to hold the Class XII examination in online mode and it will be more practical to organise it when the Covid situation is under control.

Many state governments had also supported students' demand to cancel the exams. On Tuesday, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal urged the Centre to reconsider the exam schedule. A few days ago, Maharashtra had made a similar demand.

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, too, had appealed to minister Nishank to intervene and direct the CBSE to reconsider its decision to go ahead with the board examinations in May despite the "massive and uncontrolled" rise in Covid-19 cases.

In her letter to the education minister, Priyanka said lakhs of students and their parents have expressed "fears and apprehensions" about assembling at examination centres amid a pandemic.

Last year, the board exams had to be postponed mid-way in March. They were later cancelled and results announced on the basis of an alternative assessment scheme. P9

State firm on Std 10 board exam for now

CHETANA BELAGERE @ Bengaluru

THOUGH the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has decided to cancel the Class 10 exams due to the prevailing coronavirus pandemic, the State Government has not taken any decision regarding the state board exams.

Primary and Secondary Education Minister S Suresh Kumar, in a statement, said, "The Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) exam will be held from June 21." The statement further said no decision like the CBSE has been taken. However, keeping in view the situation in future, an appropriate decision will be taken, the minister was quoted as saying.

Speaking to *TNIE*, Sumit Batabyal, a software engineer, said, "We are shocked and my child is worried. We believe that Class 10 exams are the most crucial ones for their academic career. Now, with such a decision by the CBSE, we are not sure how the assessment will be done, on what basis marks will be awarded. Couldn't the government postpone the exams or ensure that the exam centres are close by and Covid protocols followed? They should have made it optional and parents be given a choice whether they want their child to take the exam or not," he said. P2



Ambulances carrying bodies of people who died of Covid-19 parked outside the Jahagirpura Crematorium for their last rites in Surat, Gujarat, on Wednesday | P1

KARNATAKA	APRIL 13	APRIL 14
Fresh cases	8,778	11,265
Recoveries	6,079	4,364
Deaths	67	38

ACROSS THE STATE

- Bengaluru Urban district accounted for a whopping 8,155 infections and 23 deaths on Wednesday
- District health authorities in Vijayapura and Bagalkot test devotees returning from the temple town of Srisaillam in Andhra Pradesh
- Amidst the spate of rising cases, Mysuru's tourism and hospitality sector has taken a hit, with the city seeing only 1,000 tourists in the last couple of days
- District in-charge minister S T Somashekhar says Mysuru has sought 3.5 lakh additional vaccines
- Positivity Rate in the state on Wednesday stood at 9.94%

Giving access to professional education is govt's duty: SC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE government has an affirmative obligation to facilitate access to professional education, the Supreme Court said. "While the right to pursue higher (professional) education has not been spelt out as a fundamental right in the Constitution... access to professional education is not a governmental largesse. Instead, the State has an affirmative obligation to facilitate access to education, at all levels," a bench headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud said.

The SC was hearing petitions by two students for directions to facilitate them to be admitted at Delhi's Lady Hardinge Medical College and the Maulana Azad Medical College, respectively, as per the Centre's policy on allocation of Ladakh Central Pool Seats in MBBS/BDS courses for 2020-21.

The court directed that the petitioners be granted admission to the respective colleges and admission formalities be completed within a week.

The SC also recommended the appointment of a nodal officer who will ensure that students who are duly nominated under the central pool seats are in fact admitted in their chosen course of study. "Financial hardship should not prevent students from getting admission in terms of the allocation which has been made in their favour legitimately under the central pool seats," the bench remarked.

NATIONWIDE	APRIL 13	APRIL 14
Fresh cases	1,61,736	1,84,372
Recoveries	76,481	82,339
Deaths	879	1,027

- GUJARAT:** Ambulances queue up with Covid patients outside civil hospital in Ahmedabad, as state struggles to manage inflow
- MADHYA PRADESH:** Crematoriums and burial grounds in Bhopal find it tough to manage as deaths mount
- UTTAR PRADESH:** Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath tests positive; had taken first dose of Covaxin on April 5
- RAJASTHAN:** State education board suspends exams for Classes 10 & 12

Hospitals struggle as oxygen supply becomes pain point again

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Mumbai/Bhopal/Lucknow/Raipur

IMAGES of a long, snaking queue of ambulances with Covid-19 patients waiting for admission at the Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad and another long line of vehicles with Covid fatalities outside the Jahagirpura Crematorium in Surat captured the overall grim situation in Gujarat on Wednesday.

While the state government sought to explain away the re-

curring ambulance queue outside the hospital over the past week, attributing it to following the pandemic protocol, the fact Gujarat reported 6,690 fresh cases and 67 fatalities in a day showed the disease burden it is grappling with. Surat is now the Covid epicentre in Gujarat. While the state health department claimed 22 fatalities in Surat on Wednesday, local officials and sources said the actual number was higher. Maharashtra stayed on top

of the national chart, registering 60,212 fresh positive cases and 281 deaths, which is why it began its fortnight long janta curfew at 8 pm. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray asked government officials to focus on setting up jumbo Covid-19 treatment centres, scale up oxygen production and break the chain of the virus to flatten the curve. Except for essentials, all activities will stay shut till May 1. Madhya Pradesh recorded 8,998 fresh cases in a day with

28 of its 52 districts logging in three-digit single-day spikes. Chief Minister Shrivraj Singh Chouhan said the Remedial situation was comfortable as 31,000 vials have already been procured, while 12,000 more will arrive by Thursday. A state helicopter has been placed on standby to fly injections to all needy districts, Chouhan said, while admitting that the supply of oxygen is a big challenge. He has sought Railway Minister Piyush Goy-

al's to help to transport oxygen from Bhopal and Rourkela. As for Uttar Pradesh's graph, it kept climbing with 17,963 fresh cases, including that of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Four districts — Lucknow, Prayagraj, Varanasi and Kanpur City — accounted for over 45% of all new cases. Chhattisgarh was third on the national table, with 15,121 new infections in a day and a case positivity rate of a whopping 28.6%.

Fishing boat hit off M'luru coast sinks, rescue ops on for 9 missing fishermen

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Mangaluru, Karwar

A day after a Singapore-registered ship collided with a fishing vessel in the Arabian Sea, the search operation continued for the second day on Wednesday for the missing fishermen. Fourteen fishermen, hailing from Kerala, went missing after the 'Singapore MV APL Le Havre' container ship hit the 'IFB Rabah' about 45 nautical miles from New Mangalore Port near Panambur on Tuesday.

The Indian Coast Guard had found three bodies of fishermen on Tuesday night and rescued two others, while nine fishermen are still missing. The deceased fishermen are Alexander Syrang, his uncle (name not known) and Manik Das from West Bengal. The accident is said to have occurred early on Tuesday. Sunil Das (34) from West Bengal and Velumuran (37) from Rameswaram



Indian Navy personnel conduct search and rescue operations for the missing fishermen, in the Arabian Sea off the Mangaluru coast on Wednesday | EXPRESS

"We were sleeping, when we suddenly heard a loud noise. Our boat started sinking and we fell into the sea. However, we managed to get to the top of the boat. The ship which hit our boat returned and rescued us."

in Tamil Nadu are the survivors.

The rescue effort by the Coast Guard and Coastal Security Po-

lice has been delayed as the fishing boat has completely submerged in the sea. The Indian Navy too has deployed its

surface and air assets for the Search and Rescue (SAR) mission. Indian Naval Ships Tillanchang and Kalpeni, along with Naval aircraft from Goa, were deployed in the area to augment the efforts.

The INS Subhadra, a patrol vessel, also sailed from Karwar with a diving team on board. The ship arrived on scene in the early hours of Wednesday and two specialist diving teams are undertaking snagline search in the area in an effort to locate the sunk fishing craft.

Sharing their tragic experience, Sunil and Velumuran said that since the catch was less, they decided to venture far out into the sea. "We were sleeping, when we suddenly heard a loud noise. Our boat started sinking and we fell into the sea. However, we managed to get to the top of the boat. The ship which hit our boat returned and rescued us," said a visibly upset Sunil.

RAHUL ENTERS BENGAL POLL SCENE, ATTACKS DIDI & BJP

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Kolkata

DEBUTING his campaign in Bengal on Wednesday, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi tore into TMC and BJP. Taking potshots at TMC chief Mamata Banerjee, he claimed the Congress has never compromised on its ideology to gain power, but the state's ruling party has a history of joining hands with the saffron camp.

"Has the Congress party ever compromised with the BJP? Has it ever allied with the BJP? No. But Mamataji has done so," Rahul said, adding that for his party, the fight with the BJP is ideological, not just political. "Their (BJP's) ideology murdered our biggest leader Gandhiji. We will die, but not back down against this ideology. But for Mamataji, it is just a political battle," said

Gandhi, while addressing a rally at Gopalokhar in North Dinajpur.

He urged the electorates to vote for the Congress-Left Front-Indian Secular Force alliance, as neither the BJP nor the TMC can be trusted.

Referring to the TMC's previous alliance with the BJP, the former Congress president said Prime Minister Narendra Modi often talked about a Congress-hands with the saffron camp. "The TMC is fine for them (BJP)," he noted.

"Their (BJP's) battle is with the Congress's ideology. They know Rahul Gandhi will never back down. I am not scared of them. In fact, they are scared of Rahul Gandhi. This

is a fight for the future of Bengal. To save Bengal, you have to stop BJP's advent."

Hitting out at Mamata's governance, Rahul alleged that it is the only state where the poor people have to pay 'cut money' to get jobs. Taking a jibe at the *Khela Hobe* (Game On) slogan coined by Mamata, he said: "You are talking about a game on the street. I am talking about a game (students' politics) in university and college campuses which you will not allow," said Rahul.

Accusing the BJP of trying to divide Bengal, he said the saffron party wants to implement the same practice that they followed in Assam and Tamil Nadu. "I have come here not to give a political speech. I have come here to save Bengal's future," he said. P10

Has the Congress party ever compromised with the BJP? Has it ever allied with the BJP? No. But Mamataji has done so — Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader